



PREGNANCY AND BEYOND

Make Healthy Choices for Yourself and Your Baby

When you're about to be a new mom, it can feel like there's a lot to do and learn. You'll likely hear well-meaning advice from family, friends, and even total strangers. You may feel a mix of emotions.

"First, don't expect the worst. Expect the best," says Dr. Kimberly Yonkers, a researcher and psychiatrist at Yale University. "While some information or statistics might seem scary, keep in mind that the vast majority of the millions of pregnancies in the U.S. each year are healthy."

Staying Healthy during Pregnancy

Healthy eating is always important, but it's even more so during pregnancy. A

well-balanced diet can help ensure that you and your baby get all the nutrients you both need. Select a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats or other protein sources, and low-fat dairy products.

Be sure to get enough of the vitamin folate, found in foods like orange juice and leafy green vegetables. Experts recommend that all women of childbearing age add to, or supplement, their diet by taking 0.4 mg (400 micrograms) of folic acid, a form of folate, every day. Taking folic acid supplements at least a month before becoming pregnant and throughout the first 3 months of pregnancy can lower a baby's risk for certain birth defects by as much as 70%. Other nutrients that

play essential roles during pregnancy are found in most prenatal vitamins.

For your baby's safety, avoid certain foods such as raw fish, undercooked meat, deli meat, and unpasteurized cheese. Fish and shellfish can contain varying levels of methylmercury—a toxic metal—that may harm an unborn baby. During pregnancy, choose options that generally have low levels of this metal, such as shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish. Pregnant women can eat up to 12 ounces of these fish each week.

Keeping your body moving while you're pregnant can help you stay strong, feel and sleep better, and prepare your body for birth. Walking



groups for moms and prenatal yoga classes might be a good place to find support and community while staying active. “With a few considerations, most women can continue their regular levels of physical activity throughout pregnancy,” Reddy says.

Since gaining too much or too little weight during pregnancy can raise the risk of problems for both you and your baby, talk to your health care provider about the right amount of weight gain based on your pre-pregnancy weight. Ask about how much food you should eat, the nutrients you’ll need, and the amount and type of physical activity that’s safe for you.

Also talk to your doctor about any medications and supplements you take, chemicals or potentially toxic things you’re exposed to, and any habits or behaviors you may be concerned about, like alcohol or drug use. Together, you can make a plan to help keep yourself and your developing baby safe.

Getting early and regular prenatal care is the best thing you can do to keep yourself and your baby healthy while you’re pregnant. Every woman and each pregnancy is unique. See your health care provider throughout your pregnancy to ask about what’s right for you, and to help you stay physically and mentally healthy.

AFTER BABY ARRIVES

As you adjust to being a mom, be sure to take care of yourself too!

- **Connect with other moms.** Look for a moms’ group in your community or online.
- **Make time for yourself.** Do something you enjoy, like listening to music, reading a book, watching a favorite show, or taking a hot bath without interruption.
- **Be realistic.** No need to strive for perfection. Do what you can.
- **Ask for help.** Don’t be afraid to ask family and friends for help, whether it’s caring for the baby or doing household chores.
- **Rest when the baby rests.** Sleep is just as important for you as it is for the baby.

